

Bicycle Advisory Committee Meeting

6-8:00pm | June 9th, 2020

BAC Members Present: David Stein, Christopher Achterman, Ellen Ballantine, Kerry Aszklar, Caroline Crisp, Clint Culpepper, Victor Duong, Reza Farhoodi, Catherine Gould, Kelly Hansen, Ally Holmqvist, Iain MacKenzie, Rithy Khut, Nicholas Swanson, Katherine Sheie, Korrin Weldon

BAC Members Absent: Alexandra Zimmerman, Sarah Iannarone, Alexa Jakusovsky, Phil Richman, Yashar Vasef

Presenters: Bryan Poole, Zef Wagner, Briana Orr, Gabe Graff

Introductions/Announcements (6:00-6:10)

Columbia-Lombard Plan (6:10-6:55)

Bryan Poole from PBOT presented on the Columbia-Lombard Plan, a project to evaluate and implement strategies for the needs along the Columbia and Lombard corridors. ODOT is a project partner for both planning and funding. The Columbia-Lombard Plan aims to develop projects and strategies to improve safety, freight access and mobility, active transportation, and access to transit. The final plan will identify top project priorities and establish a strategy for funding and implementation.

Poole mentioned that the plan is responding to aging infrastructure, safety issues, and connectivity gaps. The project team developed a corridor crash history study, finding particularly high numbers of crashes around the I-205 onramps. On Lombard, the study found greater numbers of bike and pedestrian crashes at the western end of the project area, particularly crashes involving bicycles and pedestrians. Closer to the middle of the corridor, near 33rd and 42nd avenues, the study identified additional fatal crashes, mostly related to high-speed driving.

In addition to the crash study, the project team put together a composite demand study to identify areas of high demand and options to connect people to where they want to go. The study also identified bubbles of high- and low-stress facilities, finding a series of “islands” lacking connectivity between them.

In improving safety and connectivity, Poole noted that the project team is also working to improve travel speeds, predictability, lighting, and crossings. The project recommendation separates the corridor into six segments and proposes a “ladder” network of bicycle facilities to provide low-stress options to access areas of high demand for jobs and recreation.

A BAC member asked why the project only includes painted bike lanes as opposed to physical separation. Poole answered that PBOT is looking at the Columbia-Lombard plan as a short-term implementation project, and that the presence of driveways makes physical separation on the south side of the corridor particularly tricky. Zef Wagner from PBOT added that at first, ODOT seemed to only be interested in buffered lanes at most. Now, however, ODOT has updated its Blueprint for Urban Design, which Wagner noted may make the Columbia-Lombard corridor a good test case for better protection. He added that it ultimately comes down to how the corridor roads are classified, but ODOT has said some protected bike lanes could be possible here.

Another member commented that they were disappointed that the project does not even look at protected bike lanes even though they are part of the 2030 Bike Plan. They added that the project should be looking to fill gaps so that Lombard can act as a continuous corridor to bike safely on, and that building neighborhood greenways exclusively has not worked. Poole responded that the plan does not propose removing bike lanes from the TSP, and the team would want to keep better lanes in if ODOT shifts policy. He added that the projects shown are realistic short-term ideas that could complement neighborhood greenway projects.

Wagner mentioned that it may be a good idea to illustrate the ideal future vision for the corridor. He added that without reconfiguring the freeway interchange, the plan is limited; right now, the corridor does not even meet PBOT's criteria for lane reduction. There are options that ODOT could be convinced to add in the near future.

A member asked whether a two-way path has been looked at along the north side of the corridor segment from 11th Ave to 60th Ave, mentioning that the speed differential between bikes and cars is too high to feel safe. Wagner answered that the project team looked at that option, but the extremely long spacing between signals proved to be a challenge. There would be many conflict points in the absence of a major rebuild.

Another member asked how severe the driveway issues are, mentioning that Cully Boulevard has driveways that cross cycle tracks. Wagner answered that because this is such a high-speed road, cars waiting to enter the roadway would probably block the entire cycle track, where Cully is smaller. A two-way track creates more turning conflicts. Poole added that Option 1 of the potential road layouts gives a lot more space to work with a potential two-way cycle track in the future.

A member asked what the final speed limits along the corridor will be. Poole answered that the team has been working with ODOT to lower speed limits. Wagner added that ODOT changed its methodology, and PBOT is allowed to resubmit requests for speed limit changes, so the corridor could reasonably see reduced speed limits in the coming years.

Another member asked whether there is an opportunity to emulate Rosa Parks Way along the south side of the corridor and to potentially reuse the parking lane. Poole answered that there is only about 8 feet of free space, so not enough to add bike lanes to both sides of the corridor.

A member asked if travel lanes are at their minimum width; Wagner responded that they are, at 11 feet. Some changes to the freeway system and ramps could significantly reduce volumes enough to provide more room to work with, but this would be a bigger planning exercise PBOT would have to do with ODOT. As like Rosa Parks, traffic separators have some potential; ODOT would probably be open to

that. He added that floating parking would be a more difficult ask, especially given the high speeds along the corridor.

A member asked why ODOT would allow unprotected bike lanes while disallowing floating parking as a buffer. Wagner answered that ODOT does not want fixed obstructions a car could potentially crash into.

Poole said that the project team will be working with the Pedestrian Advisory Committee and others to prioritize pedestrian improvements. For freight improvements, the plan will work to improve traffic flow, mobility, reliability, and access. Next steps for the project are further concept development work and reviewing survey feedback, which will help as projects are bundled and prioritized. The draft plan should be released in early fall for comment.

A member asked how the project will improve the issue of high speeds as the limits will not change and proposed cross-sections were not substantially different. Poole responded that the project team is looking at what crash types are happening and addressing them, noting that high speeds are primarily an issue on Lombard and during off-peak hours. He added that most crashes the team identified occurred as people tried to get on/off corridor, drinking and driving, and driving excessively fast anyway. Wagner answered that ODOT is mostly nervous about moving to one lane in the eastbound direction, but he would float that idea. He mentioned that another way to reduce speeds would be through adding more signals and therefore places for people to stop. 15th, 33rd, and 42nd are streets people are turning on and off without signals right now. Wagner said the project team is also looking into access management as a tool to reduce speeds, acknowledging that he was hearing the project team may need to reach farther and illustrate what it actually thinks would solve the problem in addition to what is possible right now. Poole added that they recognize this is not an all-ages and abilities route, and other east-west routes are more accommodating.

A member asked how the project team is measuring its priorities of freight, active transportation, safety, and access, mentioning that they felt freight was being particularly prioritized. Poole responded that those goals can be in conflict but don't always have to be. Corridors and even segments therein are unique, and the project team is aiming to be more geographically focused on specific needs for different areas. Wagner added that the project makes a pretty light touch on freight, as the freight sector has expressed that the corridor is mostly working fine and just does not want conditions to worsen.

Another member expressed fear that the project will be an investment in bike infrastructure that people do not use as they personally would not feel safe on the proposed street layout and currently see a lot of speeding between 33rd & 82nd Avenues. Wagner answered that the current situation dissuades people from even trying to bike; bicycle counts along the corridor found only one person per day on average.

A member asked if it would be possible to implement a greenway-like solution to keep freight flowing smoothly and car speeds down. Wagner responded that the team is attempting to emulate some of that by adding in more signals as well as truck signal priority; the current issue is that the large amount of space between signals does not provide much incentive to slow down.

Project Updates (6:55-7:25)

Briana Orr and Gabe Graff from PBOT presented updates on several projects to the BAC. Orr has recently stepped up to manage several projects. Graff mentioned that PBOT Maintenance Operations has reduced schedule capacity on quick build projects and Better Naito, among others.

Orr mentioned that the MLK/Grand Rose Lane project is headed into final draft designs and will likely be delivered this summer. PBOT is working on another bus priority project at Collin's Circle.

Graff mentioned that PBOT is also working on a two-way cycle track on the east side of Naito Parkway, which should begin construction in July. Better Naito Forever is slated to begin construction in fall. Orr added that the installation for the NW Broadway project has been delayed to summer 2020 due to COVID; the traffic circle roundabout has slightly changed shape but will still be implemented, and a loading platform will be installed at Couch and Broadway to allow unloading at curb height due to feedback from Central City Concern.

Graff mentioned that the East Burnside project will involve extending the bus lane on the Burnside Bridge and providing a new signal phase at Burnside and MLK, an intersection with a high right turn volume. He added that other intersections will have dashed red lines to indicate where cars may enter the bus lane to turn right.

Orr discussed the Hawthorne/Madison project, where PBOT is potentially looking at phase-separating bicycle movements from right turn movements at Hawthorne and 11th as well as Hawthorne and 7th. The project will also incorporate a raised Zicla platform between 11th and 12th. PBOT estimates fall delivery.

Finally, Graff discussed SW 4th Ave, repaving the street from Lincoln to Ankeny and incorporating an incorporating a bus lane from Lincoln to Mill as well as a new bike lane. The project will place the bus lane adjacent to the bike lane with protection in between and install a floating bus island near Harrison St. Finally, the project will install new signals at multi-lane marked crossings.

A BAC member commented that they were happy to see progress on SW 4th Avenue and would like to schedule a work session for detailed feedback. They added that they do not think people will feel comfortable riding the bus post-COVID and wondered if Portland could roll out quick bike-oriented improvements, as Mexico City rolled out 54 kilometers of temporary bike lanes recently. Graff answered that PBOT is looking how to quickly move forward on projects like Safe Streets Initiatives. However, even low-cost projects are limited by PBOT maintenance crew capacity. PBOT is looking to identify streets that may lend themselves to very low-cost, temporary treatments.

Another member asked what feedback the presenters were looking for. Orr responded that they were not looking for specific input at the moment. Broadway and MLK/Grand are going into construction soon, and PBOT is working on the technical aspects of the Hawthorne project. Graff added that the SW 4th Avenue project is sort of an outlier as it is at the very beginning stages.

Committee Business (7:25-7:45)

The BAC discussed writing a letter regarding how they would like the world to look post-COVID, with racial equity at the forefront. A member mentioned they felt the letter to be particularly necessary as Multnomah County looks to open, and that they were disappointed to see projects delayed rather than accelerated. They do not think the city will see a shift in bicycle mode share.

Another member asked if PBOT had any data on how well temporary diversion on greenways was working. Roger Geller answered that PBOT has not been collecting data to his knowledge, but anecdotally, he is hearing that people like them. He has heard demand for more across the city.

A member gave kudos to whoever marked routes in Google maps as not being drivable.

The BAC voted on how well they felt the City is handling COVID response. One member felt the response is ok, not great, and it is not developing the capacity the city will need if transit use is drastically reduced. Another member mentioned they were not worried about this exact moment, rather when people return to their office jobs if TriMet is not running at regular capacity. They added that PBOT should be planning for an increase in drive alone rates.

A member asked PBOT to consider encouraging cycling without depending upon enforcement as a tool, and that the key will be developing physically separated spaces that cars cannot enter.

A member shared that most of their office rides transit, and PBOT should see this as an opportunity to encourage bike ridership. A second member added that success even for greenway ridership has depended on where people live and commute to. Another member mentioned that they believe there to be up to a year for PBOT to take action before traffic gets back to previous levels.

A member commented that they would want PBOT to match what other cities are doing at the bare minimum.

Another member asked if there were a number of bike lanes set to be installed this summer; Geller answered that there was no mileage total, but rather a number of funded projects that are still set for summer construction.

A member mentioned that if PBOT wants to entertain the possibility of new bike ridership, it must also think about the need for secure bike parking.

A member volunteered to draft the letter.

Public Comment (7:45-8:00)

A meeting attendee showed a video of a bicycle skyway model they created. A member mentioned it reminded them that grade separation is sometimes particularly crucial when bicyclists are crossing railroad tracks, for example, as well as the bridge that will cross Lombard or Columbia, which will instead come down to the railroad tracks. They asked if Metro could present to the BAC on their plans for this structure. Geller answered that he would put it on the list.

A member asked if future BAC meetings could include a chat box. Geller responded that the Zoom Webinar format does not offer chat, but the committee will look at different options.

An attendee commented that it would be great to include the role of policing vs. design in transportation to manage safety as part of the committee letter. They also mentioned that a short segment of Terwilliger is being paved and striped, asking why the road configuration did not use the Climate Action or Vision Zero plans to decide where paint should go for bike lanes. A BAC member agreed that the space along Terwilliger is constrained, but many buses use the route.

Another attendee mentioned that they had been riding as many bike lanes as possible during quarantine, noting they felt particularly uncomfortable riding on SW Bond due to the surfacing and that bike lane surfacing across the city seems to vary in quality. Two BAC members mentioned they have also noticed this variation, and one added that they are not a fan of green bike lanes to begin with and would prefer that PBOT try using asphalt more often, especially as it is cheaper than concrete.

Meeting Adjourned.